

Interviewer: My name is Alicia Mittelman; I'm a curator here at the Estes Park Museum. This oral history project is a partnership between the Estes Park Valley Library and the Estes Park Museum. I moved to Estes Park in 2009 and began rock climbing that same year. Today is November 7, 2012; this interview is taking place at the Estes Park Museum. [This interview is also available in video format, filmed by Brian Brown. The interview was transcribed by Tom Williams with assistance from Alicia Mittelman.]

Interviewer: What is your full name?

Steve Komito: Steven Leonard Komito.

Interviewer: When and where were you born Steve?

Steve Komito: Ft. Wayne, Indiana, March 29, 1941.

Interviewer: When did you begin rock climbing?

Steve Komito: I started mountaineering in 1958.

Interviewer: Where were some of your first adventures?

Steve Komito: In the Tetons of Wyoming. At that date I came to Wyoming with a group of boys from my home town on a YMCA sponsored trip. We went through a day of climbing instruction with the Exum School and then a few days later we climbed the Grand Teton by the Owen Spalding Route and that was the beginning of my intense interest in mountains and mountaineering.

Interviewer: What did your family think of your adventures?

Steve Komito: They thought it was rather stupid.

Interviewer: And they had a nickname for you.

Steve Komito: Meshugeneh, which in Yiddish means crazy.

Interviewer: They thought spending time in the mountains, mountaineering was,

Steve Komito: Something they would not care to do and could see no valid reason for it.

Interviewer: Were there any friends in your home town interested in mountaineering?

Steve Komito: A few of the boys who had been with me on the YMCA trip later accompanied me back to the Tetons on our own for a repeat of the first trip.

Interviewer: And when did you come out to Colorado?

Steve Komito: In the fall of 1960 to be a student at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

Interviewer: What were you studying there?

Steve Komito: Engineering.

Interviewer: And did you have trips into the foothills near campus?

Steve Komito: That's why I came here.

Interviewer: And I understand technical climbing in the Flat Irons was popular at the time; did you participate in climbing there?

Steve Komito: Sure, the Flat Irons and Eldorado Canyon and Boulder Canyon, and occasional trips up here to the real mountains.

Interviewer: What was your impression of the Rocky Mountains at that time?

Steve Komito: I was just astonished and I felt that I'd finally come home to a place that I'd been homesick for, for most of my life.

Interviewer: When did you move to Estes Park and what attracted you to the area?

Steve Komito: I had wanted to move here for a number of years. I'd been living in Boulder for most of a decade. I'd started my business in Boulder after I left school, and Estes Park at that time was just a place that we would come through on our way to mountain adventures. And as I got older and acquired a family, I began to think, "I think I'd rather live in a small town than in Boulder," which by that time had grown quite large. At that time the possibility of buying a home in Boulder was pretty much out of reach, where remote Estes Park, I felt had a little more reasonable real estate. So after a bit of looking around we did find a place, I am still in it after 41 years.

Interviewer: Please describe your first business.

Steve Komito: Well, my first business is the same one I'm in. I was repairing mountain footwear. That would be both mountain boots, hiking boots, and rock climbing shoes. That was in Boulder and at that same time I began to buy footwear of that nature and to start to sell it in my shop. I had to begin that very slowly because that is pretty

capital intensive and I was pretty capital short. But as the business slowly grew, first in Boulder, then in Estes Park, the retail end of it became much more important, a much larger portion of the revenue and that really continued up until about the mid-1980s. At that time a number of much larger businesses had begun competing in the mountain footwear business and after a while I realized I simply could not compete with them on the retail end, so I pretty much eliminated boot sales and concentrated just on the repair business which was still a place that I could compete in. So the only retail business I do now is primarily footwear accessories and guidebooks and lamps.

05:32

Interviewer: Was there anyone else in Estes Park providing this service at the time you began your business here?

Steve Komito: Well, it would depend upon how you defined "a service." In the 41 years that I have lived here there have been three general shoe repair shops that have come and gone. And by specializing just in mountain footwear and concentrating especially on the mail order end of that business, I'm happy to say that after more than four decades, "I'm still here." There were retailers from time to time, and there still are, who are selling what we call outdoor equipment. And several of those are here still and the whole outdoor industry has grown so great that 40 years ago I could never have anticipated that it would be as large of an industry as it is. And my decision to just specialize on a small portion of that industry rather than trying to compete with so many other retailers, I feel has still proven to be a wise decision.

Interviewer: Where was your shop?

Steve Komito: Ha, my first shop was located in the basement of my home and that was up on Davis Hill and even though I was vaguely aware that that region was not zoned for business, I figured if I don't bother anybody, probably they won't both me, but that was very naive. I was much younger then and the neighbors started to notice that there were a lot of long haired types coming and going from my house, sometimes trying out brand new boots. So they filed a complaint with the town. The building inspector came around and saw what I was doing and said, "You know, this isn't zoned for retail business, so you are going to have to move." I was so fond of the location of being right underneath of my home and my family that I actually hired an attorney to see if we couldn't get a variance, and that was hopeless. So in the spring of 1972 I had to go about looking for a legitimate retail location and the first one that I found was at Beaver Point which is on the western edge of Estes Park.

Now a days it is directly across from National Park Village South. I was there for two years and then at the end of that time the County, which was occupying a large building closer to town which had formerly been the National Park Headquarters, the County Offices moved out to a different location and that building became available. So I was able to get a lease on that building. It was quite a bit larger than I needed, but fortunately at the same time one of my close companions got the concession for mountain climbing guiding at Rocky Mountain Park. So he took the upstairs for his office and I took the downstairs for my business. Between the two of us we could just barely make the overhead. Later on another acquaintance moved into the upstairs and started a soft goods company. He was making gators and packs, it was called Banana Equipment. And so that operation worked pretty good for about 12 years.

Interviewer: Who owned the guide service upstairs?

Steve Komito: His name was Michael Covington, he got the concession from the Park after the existing concessionaire, who was a Swiss guide just released it, he didn't want to renew it. And Rocky Mountain Park still allows only one mountain climbing concession. And at that time it attracted quite a lot of business, both in mountain instruction, climbing instruction and in guided trips. He later sold that business, right about 1980. It was purchased by Mike and Peggy Donahue who ran it into the late '90s and then they sold it and the current owners have it now.

10:40

Interviewer: And your friend selling the soft goods, what was his or her name?

Steve Komito: Well he moved out because he needed more room and then eventually his business went bankrupt, but among the three of us we were able to keep the thing going for quite a while. Twelve years, it was a good twelve years.

Interviewer: And just to be clear, what year did you begin your business on Davis Hill?

Steve Komito: That was in 1971 when I moved to Estes Park. We'd been living in a trailer in a trailer park in Boulder, and after we found this very reasonable house, which in those days sold for less than a compact car does nowadays. And I thought, "Well this would be a very economical way to run my business," unfortunately it wasn't legally zoned.

Interviewer: What was it like in the earliest years that you owned your business?

Steve Komito: Particularly after I moved into the old Park headquarters building, I was just surrounded by lots of young people with similar interests to mine, and it almost made me think that maybe I was Peter Pan and this was the land of lost boys and a few lost girls. It was just a very stimulating time for me. Estes Park in those days was, as I had said, just a place to drive through on the way to the mountains. The thought of actually being able to live here year round seemed just an impossible dream and yet we were able to make that happen and I was very pleased at that time. It did work, none of us were earning a huge income but it was enough to keep us there. And for most of them who were young and single it was enough.

Interviewer: Did you host friends in the store?

Steve Komito: Well even nowadays, more than 30 years later, I am occasionally accosted by someone who says, "Oh, I remember sleeping in your shop for about three weeks in the summer of 1978," or something like that. It was a little island of outcasts in the middle of this town. And for years I felt as if we were sort of establishing a colony in the midst of hostile natives. We did survive for quite a while.

Interviewer: How was it for you to operate your business and have the shop teeming with activity?

Steve Komito: I thought it was great. Most of these people were either friends or close acquaintances, or they soon became that way. And it may have seemed a little strange, particularly to some of the neighbors. That is a residential neighborhood, to see young people coming and going at all hours. Especially during the summers there would be young people coming up from some of the valley towns like Boulder or Denver who would actually bivouac in the parking lot, since it was forbidden to do that in the National Park, so that they could get up early to go in and do climbs in the National Park. There were occasional controversies regarding that but fortunately it never came down to any big problem.

Interviewer: Was the atmosphere complete?

Steve Komito: You mean with regard to the climbing?

Interviewer: Yes.

Steve Komito: Most young climbers are fairly competitive, but there's also a sense of mutual assistance. Climbers will tell each other about a particular route that they had done or that they would like to do. So yeah, it's sort of a band of brothers and sisters. Remember now, that was the '70s and life styles were changing quite a bit then and young people, instead of finishing school and going immediately into a job career, many were just sort of hanging out. And because

climbing can involve areas of interest all over the globe, a lot of them had become world travelers. And that just added to the sense of companionship. Often there would be people sleeping at the shop when I'd come in early in the morning that I didn't know, but for the most part that didn't cause much of a problem.

15:45

Interviewer: In an article you contributed to in 1998 you explain that, "You and your friends created a community of climbers in the midst of a tourist town." Tell me more about how you cohabitated your colony with a busy summer town.

Steve Komito: At times it did seem as if we were aliens. Fortunately that location was remote enough that we didn't have too many visitors who were really interested in what we had to offer. As the guide service became much larger, there would be lots of clients coming through to take climbing lessons or to be guided for climbs in the Park and often they became my customers. But as far as the general run of visitors, we really didn't encounter them other than normal activities of the day, going out for groceries or laundry or whatever else we were doing. As I say, it was sort of an isolated colony. In my present shop, which I had to move to in 1986, I am much more in that you might call the "main stream," and so I have many encounters during the day trying to explain that, "No, we don't sell Western boots, no, we don't fix purses, yes I can tell you where the liquor store is. Occasionally, yes I can tell you where there are some excellent hikes and climbs in the Park." Back at the old shop we used to joke that we considered ourselves to be the "fun city ranger station" because we were a source of information for many Park visitors.

Interviewer: Tell us where your present location is and.

Steve Komito: It's three doors left of the post office. I moved there in 1986 when, as I told you earlier, my retail business was really, it was beginning to decrease rapidly due to the pressure of many more competitors, particularly large retailers like REI. So, I couldn't maintain all that space, I didn't need it anymore, so this little location that I'm in now became available and begrudgingly I moved there. The guide service after a few years took over the building and actually even bought the building and it's still there.

Interviewer: How did demand evolve over the years and how did you adapt to new styles of footwear including EB [Eduard Bourdineau] boots to sticky rubber.

Steve Komito: Well it's always hard to foresee the future, and back when I started most climbers were using very heavy mountaineering boots, even for hiking, and then what was called in those days klettern schuh which is a German term meaning climbing shoe, which more resembles a Chukka Boot. And that was what we were working on. And as time evolved the technology slowly became much more advanced. It didn't require that much of an adaptation because it was still boot repair. Boots of course now are much lighter and climbing shoes are tiny by comparison. I guess the main change has been in the heavier hiking and mountaineering boots, most nowadays do not have what we call a stitched on sole. Adhesive takes almost all of the load for attaching a crude upper to a boot sole. And that required a little bit of adaptation but it's not rocket science.

20:15

Interviewer: In your own career of mountaineering, did you maintain using some of the more traditional footwear or did you adapt to the more recent styles?

Steve Komito: Sure, there were great advantages to the more modern footwear, particularly in the mid '80s, 1980s when high friction rubber became available and that really changed the industry. Of course I started to use it myself and then once we had high friction rubber available to us, that really increased the rock climbing shoe business. And that portion of our repair business, that is rock climbing shoes, is about one half to two thirds of our volume. The other is in the hiking boots and mountaineering boots and traditional cross country ski boots.

Interviewer: Do other big equipment advancements come to mind?

Steve Komito: Oh yeah, the industry has really exploded. Back when I started climbing, climbers protected themselves with temporary attachments to the rock, which were called pitons. Those were driven into the cracks in the rock with a hammer and usually, if they could, be removed with a hammer. And the big breakthrough in those came in the early 1970s with the adaptation of chalkstones, artificial chalkstones, usually made of aluminum that could be wedged in the cracks and first of all weren't so heavy, secondly didn't require a heavy hammer, and third of all were less damaging to the rock. And then in the late '70s the spring loaded cams were developed and that's made a huge change. Also when I began climbing, most climbers just tied in directly to the rope around their waist or with a wrap of one inch webbing the middle, those were called "swami belts." Because I was climbing with much more advanced, much more skillful climbers than myself,

occasionally I had to ask for tension from the rope, and I found that the ties around my waist were very uncomfortable. In fact it could even make breathing very difficult. So I fabricated, on my own, what later has become to be known as climbing harnesses. And the climbing harnesses have made a big difference and they are pretty standard now, but when I first started using them I was teased by the fact that it looked like an athletic supporter. Well, [chuckles], in a way it was but not in a traditional sense. So sure, in climbing. Of course in the clothing it's just exploded with water proof, breathable gear. That was always a big problem, if you had something that was waterproof, it made you sweat. If you had something that didn't make you sweat, it soaked through. Lightweight insulations, so the outdoor industry has just expanded almost exponentially.

Back in the old days I would occasionally go to trade shows in order to see what was new on the market. But in those days the trade show, which was usually a once or twice a year event, was dominated by the downhill ski industry and they only grudgingly allowed other types of outdoor equipment to be shown. And now the outdoor ski industry is in a period of either stagnant growth or decline. And the other parts of the outdoor industry have just exploded. Usually at least once a year I will go to this huge outdoor retailer show in Salt Lake City. It's just like Alice in Wonderland, it's unbelievable how much equipment is there, how many retailers come to do business, and how important that show is for the city of Salt Lake City. Apparently it's the largest single convention that they have there. There is even rumors about it possibly being moved to Denver, and of course there is always competition for that type of business because it generates a lot of income even if for just a short period of time. The outdoor industry has exploded. At one time, I think we felt that we were sort of apart from the rest of humanity and now a whole lot of humanity has just overwhelmed us, particularly with regard to indoor climbing gyms. Forty years ago if you would have said, "There would be a large number of climbers who never left the indoors," I would have said, "Oh, come on." But obviously climbing gyms are being built all over the country now. I say, "There's nothing wrong with that."

Interviewer: Steve you mentioned making your own harness. Were others, were your friends building their own equipment, designing their own things to suit their needs in the mountains?

Steve Komito: Well, climbers are often fairly innovative but as far as the harness, this was back in the early '60s, I don't think that anybody else at that time that I was climbing with had a harness. They just tied in

with a swami belt, the webbing around the waist. I was only able to do that because at that time I was working for a company called Jerry Mountain Sports and they had heavy duty sewing machines for making packs, and so during my off hours I would just get some webbing and make it up on their sewing machines.

Interviewer: And these were friends in Boulder?

Steve Komito: Most of my friends were in Boulder, although once again climbers can be quite itinerate. In those days there were a number of climbers from Laramie, [Wyoming] who would come down to Boulder, just because of the accessible climbing and also because there were two outdoor shops there, Jerry's and Holubar's where they could buy equipment. Back in that distant time there wasn't any climbing shop in Laramie.

Interviewer: You were involved in some route development here. What was the attraction to the routes you choose to establish?

Steve Komito: The attraction [laughing] was, I was being press ganged into it. In those days, and really I haven't done that many new climbs here. At that time I was climbing with Layton Kor who in the early '60s was certainly the leading climber in Colorado. Because there were so few climbers he really didn't have a large population to choose from. So occasionally I would get chosen and I would go and simply follow Layton on these climbs. He always led when I was climbing with him. So really I haven't done that many first ascents but those who runs it sometimes have gotten published.

Interviewer: Do you remember that day you climbed a route called "Mr. President?"

Steve Komito: Yes I do. That name may seem a little strange now but it was at a very emotional time. That was in November 1963 and we did that climb the weekend after John Kennedy had been assassinated. Of the many grief periods I've had in my life, that one still stands out as being a time when I just felt decimated by the loss of that president. And I think you would find that maybe a lot of my contemporaries felt the same way. When Layton and I did that route, he said, "What should we call it?" And I said, "Well because of the events of this past week let's just call it Mr. President."

Interviewer: How did you come up with the names of some of the other routes?

Steve Komito: Layton?

Interviewer: You, there was Outer Space.

Steve Komito: That was Layton's idea and that was just at the beginning of the manned space program. I guess because of its remote nature, not that it was far away but just because of being high up on the Bastille seemed like sort of a remote place. That seemed like an appropriate name, I think the first American astronauts had just gone into space, so he called it Outer Space.

Interviewer: The Bastille is in Eldorado Canyon?

Steve Komito: Eldorado Canyon, yes. It is not very remote, the road goes within just a few feet of the start of the climb but it was a very direct route and it appealed to Layton. Whenever Layton picked a name, that was the name that stuck to it. He was actually somewhat imaginative in his choice of names [chuckles]. There is a wall at the very entrance of Eldorado Canyon and it's composed of crumbly red sand stone. Well Layton had been reading some publications from Europe; those were far more available in those days than anything from the United States. At that time there was a climb in the Alps called the Rotwand, the Red Wall. And Layton, since he didn't speak German thought that that probably meant the rot wall. So there is a climb in Eldorado Canyon called the Rotwand for rotten wall named after this red wall in the Alps. Then one of the more famous classic climbs in Eldorado was named after one of the great buttresses in the Chamonix, Mt. Blanc area. That is called Grandes Jorasses and Layton looked at this and it had sort of the appearance of a long necked animal so he called it the Grand Giraffe.

But in those days, and it seems so strange now when there are so many American publications that most of the publications we had available to us originated in Europe. Some of them were translated into English or they were from the British Isles and some of them just came over in their original language. So in those days we got a lot of inspiration from these stories of famous alpine climbers. In 1963 when I finally had a full time job and could afford it I was able to get a leave of absence and go over to the Alps. Originally I had planned to go over with Layton but he'd got involved in a new route in Yosemite and said that he wasn't going to go. So I went over by myself and wandered around the eastern Alps. That was a transforming adventure for me, all by myself. Part of that, that still has resonance for now was that I would visit these lovely little alpine villages and I just thought a great place to live your life. When I came back to Colorado, at that time I was still living in Boulder, I looked on Estes Park and it seemed to be about as close as I was going to come to an Alpine village. That's why I worked to start a business that could be conducted principally through the mail if necessary so that I could be in a town that didn't have a lot

of year round business but could still function through the mail. That has seems to have worked out. About two thirds of my repair business comes from customers who have never been in my shop. They just simply send their footwear to me, I'm proud of that.

Interviewer: How did your name get out there for customers?

Steve Komito: Well, there isn't a whole lot of competition, or at least there wasn't in those days. One of the great breakthroughs I had was from my friendship with Yvon Chouinard who had his own equipment, Chouinard Equipment in those days. He began importing a rock climbing shoe from France and since I saw that that was going to become a pretty significant footwear, I contacted the manufacturer and got the original sole so that I could resole them when they wore out. Those were called the Royal Robbins Yosemite or they were referred to as the Blue Meanies because that was the color of the leather. That was a very popular rock climbing shoe in the early to mid '60s. Nowadays it is heavier than most mountaineering boots. It's just amazing that people were able to climb in those. But Chouinard since he was selling the boot, through his catalogue put in the end of that page that those boots, those rock shoes could be resoled and then he gave my name and address. And so that was really my first exposure to the greater world. Of course I'd been repairing footwear for climbers in the Boulder, Denver, Front Range area.

Interviewer: Who are some of your heroes?

Steve Komito: I actually don't like to use the word hero, simply because I think it is so over used in our society. This week's hero is next week's villain. Maybe a better current term is "role model." Chouinard was certainly a role model for me. In those days it seemed that all of the outdoor businesses were owned by the generation of our parents and then here was Chouinard who was only a few years older than myself, who was able to run a business and it seemed like it was going to be successful. You probably know that later on he sold the technical climbing business and started Patagonia. And of course that has been a very significant source in the outdoor industry. So the idea that someone of my own generation could actually start a business in the outdoor industry and make a living from it, that was a big inspiration for me to try to do the same. Then when I went to that Exum climbing school, this was in 1958, I was just in my last year of high school and I got to see real climbers for the first time. Two very famous climbers who later went on to become quite accomplished, one was Barry Corbet and the other was Jake Breitenbach. So different from the athletes that I had been exposed to earlier who were sort of crude in expression. These guys were well spoken and they just had an aura about them

that made me think, “I’d sure like to do that someday.” I tried to follow in their footsteps as best I could. Jake Breitenbach unfortunately was killed in the 1963 Everest expedition in the Khumbu ice fall and then Barry Corbet a few years after that was injured and became a paraplegic from a helicopter crash. I still remember encountering those fellows for the first time and how inspirational that was for me. That’s one of the reasons I really wanted to pursue the business of mountaineering. Of course I came from the Midwest at that time and mountaineering was not widely available and so that’s one of the reasons I finally, after a great deal of effort, was finally convince my parents that I really needed to go to school at the University of Colorado in Boulder. I could have studied engineering at any number of different places, but I knew that the Rocky Mountains were here.

Interviewer: Returning to some stories about the routes you were involved with, L’chaim, Ajax. Prior to when guide books were as plentiful as they are today, how did people come to a consensus concerning the difficulty of a route?

Steve Komito: That was a matter of controversy then and even now it’s a matter of controversy. But less so because of the large number of climbers who do these routes and there generally evolves a consensus. Back in those days there was quite a bit of controversy about, “Oh, it wasn’t that hard,” “Yes it was.” Once it’s printed in a guide book, then it tends to become more authoritative.

Interviewer: What was the conversation like following your first ascent of the sandstone tower in the Moab area?

Steve Komito: The conversation. That was once again an area of very little traffic. Very few climbers had gone into those sandstone towers. All of the time I was there, of course Layton was pretty much running the show on most of those climbs, I began to think, “I wonder if we really shouldn’t be here.” It was so different from the solid rock climbing here or in Boulder that I was used to that I thought, “Maybe we are all just going to die.” It was a new area of exploration and of course the Desert Towers are commonly climbed. That’s sort of the evolution of climbing or the evolution of human activity. Once it’s been done then it opens the way for others to follow.

Interviewer: You mention the word “exploration,” was that a big component in your motivation for mountaineering?

Steve Komito: Sort of. I’ve always been a bit timid and exploration often refers to going [chuckles] to where hardly anyone has gone before. I often have tended to assume that if the outcome wasn’t fairly certain,

that it might be bad. So yeah, in those days a lot of climbing involved a certain amount of exploration and certainly there are those who are much more motivated to explore than I am. I sort of went along as a fellow traveler. I was dependent upon climbers who were much more skilled and adventurous than myself. So I'm glad to see all of the guidebooks come out because I think of the early years and how much time I and my companions would spend blundering around in areas that turned out to be dead ends. And I thought, "I wish we knew the way to go." Eventually more and more guide books came out. In the early days a lot of that was just, it was oral history. Of course, oral history can become inaccurate.

Interviewer: Do you remember someone saying something to you that had a big impact to your approach to climbing or how you live your life?

Steve Komito: I may have to think about that. Layton, who was a very considerable influence on me in the early days, would make statements like, "Oh, don't be so afraid, the worst thing that can happen is we will just fall off and get killed." [laughter] I wish I had had time to think about that. Probably the best answer I can come up with on short notice is the idea that we only get to go through this once and when we come to the end of it and to say, "Oh I wish I had done something else," would be a great tragedy. So I have sort of conducted my life with the idea that I don't want to feel regret for how I've lived my life. Part of the reason that I have started and run my own business is because I found it very disturbing to be under the influence of a single individual as so often happens when one is working for an organization. I figured that if I was going to be dependent for my income, on my way of life, on somebody else, it had better be me.

Interviewer: Are there any last stories you'd like to share?

Steve Komito: Now that I've gotten to a stage of life where I'm less motivated to be "pushing the envelope," as they say, I think the contribution that I would like to make is first, to be of use to those who are looking for mountain adventures. In my retail business I'm often, I often encounter visitors, climbers, skiers, who are saying, "Where's a good place to go?" Having spent a lot of time in this area, I feel like I'm able to give them good advice depending on what type of outing they would like, what the current conditions are like. The other is, now that I have three grandsons, if I can pass along to them the benefits that I've derived from my years of mountain activities, hiking, climbing, cross country skiing, that would make me very happy. I've done what I can, my two older grandsons live at a place that where even though it's within a few hours' drive of the Canadian Rockies, they don't have much chance to visit it

because they are very involved in the typical sporting activities of our society, basketball and football. So whenever I'm with them, particularly when they come here, I would like to pass along to them the affection I have for mountain sports. Something out on the conventional playing fields or as I like to say, "To go to the unlevel playing fields."

Interviewer: Thank you.

Steve Komito: Thank you.

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ABSTRACT: Steve Komito was first introduced to mountaineering at the Exum School in the Wyoming Tetons in 1958. While a student at the University of Colorado he continued his passion for mountaineering on the Flat Irons, in Eldorado Canyon, and in Boulder Canyon. Steve has also done extensive climbing in the Estes Valley and in the Moab, Utah area. After leaving C.U. Steve opened Komito Boots, a retail and repair business, which he moved to Estes Park in 1971. Steve describes the evolution of climbing equipment and his contributions to those changes. Mr. Komito also reminisces about many notable climbs with well-known mountaineering pioneers. Steve Komito has been the virtual epicenter of a large community of climbers through his shared climbing expertise and above all his exemplary and extraordinary hospitality at both his home and shop over many decades. Note: Added material appears in brackets.